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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ISLAMABAD 000546

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SUBJECT: GILANI STILL TRYING FOR RECONCILIATION

Classified By: Anne W. Patterson, for reasons 1.4 (b)(d)

11. (C) Summary. In a March 13 meeting with Ambassador, Prime Minister Gilani reiterated his views that the Pakistan People's Party should end governor's rule and allow formation of a government in Punjab by any party that had the votes. Going further than he had before, Gilani said that because Zardari had pushed Nawaz Sharif in to the lawyers' camp, public pressure was building for some resolution of the judges issue. Looking toward the political future, Gilani expressed concern that he and his Pakistan People's Party were being compared to former President Musharraf. He confirmed that Zardari had rejected the idea of giving the Pakistan Muslim League (PML) either the positions of Senate leader or Chief Minister of Punjab in exchange for joining a PPP government in Punjab. Gilani, who was en route to a meeting with Zardari, said he was not opposing President Zardari but felt he should "use his power and influence to effect a political reconciliation. It does not appear March 14 that Gilani has yet succeeded. End Summary.

12. (C) In a meeting with Ambassador and Polcouns March 13, Prime Minister Gilani reviewed his efforts, which so far had been unsuccessful, to press President Zardari to compromise with the Sharif brothers before the lawyers' march reached Islamabad. It was time, said the PM, to end political debates, start governing and face the problem of militancy. Gilani repeated that he did not support governor's rule in Punjab and felt that any party that could form a coalition should be allowed to, even if that meant his Pakistan People's Party (PPP) ended up in the opposition. If we haven't "done our homework" in terms of accurately counting votes in Punjab, then why prolong the crisis. However, Gilani confirmed that Zardari had refused to offer Pakistan Muslim League (PML) leader Chaudhry Shujaat Hussain the position of leader of the Senate in exchange for joining a PPP coalition government in Punjab. Ambassador raised Shujaat's idea (reftel) of a "unity" government comprised of all three parties; Gilani said Zardari did not want to offer the PML the slot of Chief Minister Punjab either.

13. (C) Pointedly aligning himself with Benazir Bhutto and noting that the PPP should not be bracketed with former President Musharraf, Gilani expressed concern about ongoing arrests of protesters. During the meeting, Information Minister Sherry Rehman called to complain that Geo TV News had been taken off the air in some areas without her consent; Gilani said he had not been informed of any decision on Geo and would raise the issue with Zardari. Gilani went further than he has before in saying that "the tide has turned" and the government had to address the issue of the deposed

judiciary.

¶4. (C) Ambassador asked if there had been any progress on the idea of having the government appeal the Supreme Court decision disqualifying the Sharifs. Gilani said he had discussed the issue with Zardari but had come to no understanding. He repeated his view that the issue should be resolved by agreeing to adopt the Charter of Democracy (COD) formula. This would remove all judges who took the oath of office under martial law. With these judges removed, argued Gilani, the Sharifs could make their own appeal to a court they recognized. Gilani voiced concern that Zardari continued to believe he could use the issue of extending current Chief Justice Dogar beyond retirement age as a quid in negotiations with Nawaz Sharif. Dogar, said Gilani, was controversial and had to retire; raising this issue with Nawaz was like "waving a red flag at a bull."

¶5. (C) Gilani said that Pakistan needed a long-term political solution. Like Chief of Army Staff General Kayani, with whom he had met earlier in the day, Gilani said Pakistan needs to find a permanent solution to the political crisis. Even if PPP were able to form a government with PML, it would not be stable, so the question is "what do we do next?"

¶6. (C) In Gilani's view, the solution required the two major parties (PPP and Nawaz) finding a way to compromise. PML would have to make up its mind about which way to jump, but it was a minor player. Zardari had pushed Nawaz towards the lawyers, and now he needed to find a solution for the judges' issue. Time was running short for resolution before

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the planned sit-in in Islamabad, and "it was time to face political reality."

¶7. (C) Gilani said he had no "rift" with Zardari; his role was one of diminishing tensions. However, all parties had to look forward to the next election. He was not against the President, but he was being called upon to use his power and influence. It was "hard" to sit in parliament and defend decisions to restrict democratic demonstrations.

¶8. (C) Comment: Gilani was more focused, analytical and empowered than we have seen him in the past. His basic political instincts tell him that Pakistan needs a political solution to the Zardari-Sharifs showdown, but whether he can actually effect a reconciliation remains unclear. Certainly, it did not appear March 14 that Gilani has been able to make any headway with Zardari.
PATTERSON